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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BRUSSELS 000277

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EUN](#) [ECON](#) [AF](#) [AL](#) [BK](#) [EZ](#) [MW](#) [SR](#)  
SUBJECT: FEBRUARY GAERC - EU FOREIGN MINISTERS FOCUS ON  
ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND AFGHANISTAN

REF: A. BRUSSELS 247  
[1](#)B. BRUSSELS 262  
[1](#)C. BRUSSELS 219

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Classified By: USEU POL M-C Chris Davis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: In Brussels on February 23, EU Foreign Ministers, meeting in General Affairs Council, discussed preparations for the March 19-20 European Council meeting and discussed proposals for investments in energy and infrastructure under the economic recovery plan. The External Affairs Council devoted its attention to Afghanistan, the Middle East, Eastern Partnership, and the Western Balkans. Reaffirming the Council's commitment to Afghanistan, Czech FM Schwarzenberg said that "now is the time to examine options for increasing European support." Ministers warned Belarus not to recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia, Schwarzenberg saying that Belarus would be "out of the European consensus and this is very clear to them." During the working lunch on the Western Balkans, EU High Representative for CFSP Javier Solana announced that Austrian candidate Valentin Inszko was his choice as new EUSR in Bosnia, to the surprise of many. Ministers told Albania during the February 24 EU-Albania troika that the conduct of upcoming elections would be closely monitored and advised Albania not to rush their EU membership application. End Summary.

General Affairs  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) Chaired by Czech DPM Alexandr Vondra, the General Affairs session focused on preparations for the upcoming European Council meeting March 19-20 and the European economic recovery plan. Concerning preparations for the European Council - both the informal session on March 1 and the regular session March 19-20 - Vondra said that the presidency wanted to ensure a common response to the economic crisis. He said that he expected the March 1 informal in Brussels to address the following:

- functioning of the financial sector and restoration of credit flows,
- coordination of implementation of the recovery measures at the national level (including measures to support the automotive industry),
- limiting and/or preventing job losses,
- and preparations for the G20 summit meeting.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Vondra shared that the focus for ministers at the March 19-20 meeting would be on three areas. First, they will evaluate the economic and financial situation under which the EU heads of state and government will address

short-term measures based on the European recovery plan - as well as the Lisbon strategy - and a mandate of the EU 27 for the G20 summit meeting. Second, they will take up energy and climate change issues. Third, they will focus on the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

14. (SBU) Turning his attention to the European economic recovery plan, Vondra said ministers looked at the revised list of projects and their financing. It was the presidency's view that reaching agreement on the package is extremely important, as is the response to the gas crisis. Vondra added "many members stressed the need to reach agreement as soon as possible, but there is more work to be done in COREPER on the list of projects and the financing." In the meantime, Vondra suggested that the presidency will start approaching the European Parliament for discussions about the plan.

External Affairs: Afghanistan  
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15. (SBU) The EU-27 foreign ministers, meeting as the External Affairs Council, chaired by Czech FM Schwarzenberg, discussed - and issued formal Conclusions related to - Afghanistan, the Middle East, Eastern Partnership, and the Western Balkans. On Afghanistan, Schwarzenberg reported at the post-GAERC press conference that ministers had agreed that "now is the time" to increase European support. He underscored that the EU had an important role to play in funding the elections and deploying an observer mission. Schwarzenberg also highlighted the EU's support with the police mission as well as the importance of EU support being "complementary to the efforts of others." He said that the European Commission could focus on governance and the rule of law. Schwarzenberg underlined the importance of the

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"regional dimension" in the fight against terrorism, counternarcotics, and trade, saying the EU would continue to work with the U.S. on "a common approach for a stronger and safer Afghanistan."

16. (SBU) Commissioner for External Relations Ferrero-Waldner said that she would "very shortly send an exploratory mission to Afghanistan to see whether we can observe the elections," based on the security situation. Solana said that the EU would continue working with the U.S., and that the EU will continue to support its police mission there, characterizing it as "our most important contribution." Asked for details about the police mission, Schwarzenberg said there has to be "full staffing." Schwarzenberg said he personally thought the EU should work in the civilian sector. He argued there is always the need to reassess strategy after some time, then, referring to the elections, said attention will have to be devoted to counting votes. Solana maintained the target date of June for doubling the staffing of the police mission.

17. (C/NF) According to member state contacts, ministers agreed that the EU must "sort itself out" on Afghanistan by focusing on specific areas where the EU can be successful. Ministers agreed on four areas where the EU could play an important role: elections, policing, financial assistance, and regional cooperation. The presidency suggested that the 27 FMs discuss in their respective capitals contributing in those four areas. They should then be prepared to present their views at a follow-up discussion on Afghanistan at the Foreign Ministers dinner on the margins of the March 19-20 European Council meeting. Contacts noted that U.S. encouragement to member states to contribute to a greater EU role in any of the four mentioned areas could be helpful. High Representative Solana reportedly stressed that falling down on EUPOL would make the EU "look very bad." Ferrero-Waldner told FMs the Commission's assessment team would meet with NATO ISAF to discuss how ISAF could help address security concerns, as General Petraeus had suggested in his February 12 meeting with EU leaders (ref A).

## Middle East

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¶8. (SBU) On the Middle East, Schwarzenberg said that ministers discussed preparations for the Sharm al-Sheikh conference March 2. He noted the need to direct international aid "through the Palestinian Authority," Ferrero-Waldner also stressing the importance of using the Pegasus financial mechanism. Solana announced that he would be traveling to the region starting February 24 (ref B). Eastern Partnership

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¶9. (SBU) More progress was made on the Eastern Partnership, Schwarzenberg noting that this had been the first time the ministers had addressed the issue with the aim of "confirming the political and strategic scope of the program." He said there was "general consensus that the concept is viable and we discussed the level of commitments, visa and migration related issues, and we will now concentrate on drawing conclusions for upcoming meetings." Following Solana's mention that he had briefed the Council on his trip to Belarus, Schwarzenberg said that recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia would create "a really difficult situation for Belarus - they would be out of the European consensus and this is very clear to them." Answering a question suggesting that ministers had discussed the possibility of associating Russia and Turkey in aspects of the Eastern Partnership on a case-by-case basis, Schwarzenberg said "there is nothing to be said against that." He added that third countries can participate - mentioning Japan, the U.S., and China - and that the EU was open to cooperation with many countries (ref C).

## Western Balkans

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¶10. (C/NF) The Western Balkans reportedly dominated the working lunch at the GAERC. In the press conference which followed, Schwarzenberg did not announce the selection of a new EUSR for Bosnia. Solana reported that the EU still needed to "exchange views" with other members of the PIC (U.S., Russia and Turkey), adding that February 24 "that will be done." On Montenegro, Schwarzenberg reported that ministers discussed how to proceed with Montenegro's EU membership application, but did not provide any further details. During a press conference on February 24, Czech FM Schwarzenberg expressed hope that consensus could be reached,

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but declined to pronounce whether this would be taken up again at the March GAERC. (Note: We understand from our colleagues at Embassy Prague that the presidency is considering the addition of Montenegro as an "A item" on the March GAERC agenda; i.e., approved without discussion. End note.) While Schwarzenberg mentioned that ministers exchanged views about the Stabilization and Association Agreement with Serbia, no decision was reached to either unfreeze the SAA or send an independent fact-finding mission to evaluate Serbian ICTY compliance.

¶11. (C/NF) While we understand that Solana announced Inszko to be his choice for EUSR in Bosnia during the working lunch - reportedly catching many ministers off guard - no decision on the matter was taken by the Council. Some member-state contacts tell us that they were convinced that for Solana to announce his choice, the U.S. must have been on board with his decision. As a result, there was reportedly little discussion following Solana's announcement. Solana, in fact, reportedly told ministers that he would have to first consult with members of the PIC before announcing his decision publicly. As we understand it from our UK counterparts, FM Miliband left the meeting under the impression that no decision had been reached, Solana simply expressing his preference. A well-placed Council Secretariat contact, visibly frustrated by what had transpired, characterized the

situation as an "awful administrative mess."

¶12. (C/NF) We also understand from a number of our member-state and EU contacts that the current economic crisis is making many Member States more cautious on enlargement. According to member-state contacts, there was no consensus on Montenegro's membership application due to "considerable resistance" from Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands. A well-placed Council Secretariat contact told us that while the "fundamentals (of enlargement) were unchanged, these times make it difficult" for Member States - "especially Germany." Schwarzenberg's frustration was evident in the press conference following the February 24 EU-Albania troika, Schwarzenberg saying that the economic crisis was making people "more careful." Other contacts share with us privately that "a golden opportunity" - in the form of the pro-enlargement, pro-Western Balkan Czech and Swedish presidencies - could be missed and that enlargement process could be set back two years given that the following presidencies - Spanish and Belgian - are unlikely to be enlargement friendly.

Troikas

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¶13. (C/NF) An EU-Lebanon meeting followed by a Quad meeting with the Council of Europe followed on February 23, followed by the ministerial troika meeting with Albania on February 24. As we understand it from well-placed Council Secretariat sources, the Albanians were advised not to rush their membership application (we are hearing the Albanians will likely do so in the March/April time frame) and to conduct their upcoming elections in a "model fashion."

MURRAY

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